

Brunno Silva in conversation with Henrique Neves

Skype Berlin / Lisbon, June 6, 2018

BS: *Hi Henrique, I think you are currently working on the sculptures, how is the process going?*

HN: Right now, I'm working with different metals and fabrics and I am discovering the possibilities of these materials. It's the first time that I am using the metal sheets and I still have time to explore the material further. The imagery is, as you know, being drawn from my grandfather's archive – he was an architect – which I recently received. Among the motifs I am interested in the top plans and views of the roofs at the moment. Also, a strong factor in my previous works is the influence of my great-grandmother's profession as a seamstress, I was given her patterns and templates a few years back and their reference already appeared in some of my previous works.

For the other artworks, possibly an edition, I have been folding and re-positioning the images, creating new angles and maybe even changing the functionality of the plan, or of the building itself. I decided to work with it due to all its equidistant lines, since it is a rooftop view. In the end it is becoming a structure that makes no sense, an abstract architectural drawing that still resembles a plan. It's a plan without function, and I like the geometry involved in aligning the roof's lines differently.

I also still need to think of what kind of paper and reproduction mechanism I want to use for those. I want to copy and reproduce them on different papers before I decide.

BS: *So, walk me through again what are you working on.*

HN: Three things. The first, I call *collars and cuffs*. The second, this big fabric piece that would behave like an installation and the third, some specific drawings – I'm a little concerned that I might be working with too many new works. Maybe I will downsize to two.

BS: *How many pieces are you creating for the first series, the sculpture pieces?*

HN: I have four or five that I have been working on, though they are not yet fully defined, and I can incorporate one or more pieces into one single object. I need to edit, also, taking into consideration the range of materials that I have been working on so I can find the balance I am looking for. For the edition, I have been working on two pieces on paper, which could work as a multiple. One of the things I want to do is go to a gallery here in Lisbon to see how the pieces work in a gallery space. They have some plinths that I want to check out too, to see how the pieces will behave. I have been thinking also about wall shelves, but let's see.

BS: *Looking forward to seeing more next week. Can you tell me more about the big piece made of fabric?*

HN: I am thinking about the contrast between this big piece and the sculptures that are small and look almost like jewellery. So, I am considering having this group of three works, but I still need to think about it. It is hard to decide before being in Trace's space.

BS: *I can't wait to see the first images of the works, to also think about the connections that I can make once I get the visual references.*

HN: I will send them to you soon.

Skype Berlin / Lisbon, June 15, 2018

For this conversation, Henrique provided a few images of the work in progress.

BS: *Hi Henrique, how is everything going?*

HN: I am still working on the three ideas, which I still believe might be too many, but I need more time to make a final decision. The sculptures – *collars and cuffs* – are the most developed ones, I'm researching how to keep the pieces together – if I will use other materials or keep them 'clean' by using only one type of metal. I will also probably bring extra pieces, and respond to Trace's space. I still need to go to the Lisbon gallery and take pictures of them on plinths.

BS: *Tell me more about the pieces and in what you are thinking of, now.*

HN: I have been working with my grandfather's plans and drawings of a school. This is the school I went to when I was a child, so although the drawings are rather impersonal, they resonate differently – more personally – with me. I am going for something referring to these drawings and then shaping them in circular forms, this way returning to the cuffs and collars. In both ways I'm mixing these references up, looking for a form that breaks my own perception of the original material. The drawings are all technical drawings, functional plans, and I want them to become more playful, freer forms. This is what I want to achieve. From another angle, through the material I'm using, I want to bring some heaviness, an everlasting quality to the works. Something that memory always has.

BS: *Which metals/materials are you using, have you made a final decision on that?*

HN: Brass and aluminium are the metals that I will be using. For these I am using only the metal to transcribe the original material, and no paper. For example, the three first works are in brass to which I have applied black paint.

BS: *Which part of the school plan do we see here?*

HN: It is the side yard. But while I was making the drawings I made small changes to the original, sometimes I reversed positive and negative space, or cut some sections. It was a bit intuitive and just a small intervention, but it is there. I tried not to reproduce them exactly, perfectly, as they are, because I didn't want it to be just an exact copy in a different material. Plus, they look so much like jewels, precious things, because of the shimmering metal and its long-lasting quality. That also got me thinking of the contrast between these new metals I am using and the original source's paper which over time became yellowish and some details are fading, whilst the metal will last longer. This is a reference to time, importance, and disappearance.

BS: *By the images it is hard to tell if I am looking at the same piece from another angle or another work.*

HN: Yes, I wanted them to look very different depending on the angle – like some architectural buildings. Their formal, circular, movements also help to convey this dynamic aspect.

BS: *Can you tell me about the use of the colour black?*

HN: With the brass's golden colour the black works best. I tried red and it didn't work for me. I tried blue, that works a bit. The chromatic balance between the metals and dark colours works. It highlights the shimmering, the reflection of light. Also, blue, black, and red are the colours used in copy processes, including those for architecture and civil engineering.

BS: *When you mentioned the colours, it also made me think of the usual colours that as kids we used in school, the red, black, and blue pen.*

HN: Yes, maybe that is a chain reaction; this common blue for pen ink, the copying, learning, and registering. Each colour has its own story and recognisable tonalities.

BS: *Thinking of the forms, they become more and more complex.*

HN: Yes, I am still playing with the forms in different configurations, sometimes mixing more than one sheet of metal.

BS: *Maybe for the show we should have one that is very simple and a straightforward reference to the main themes, to give the audience a way into this group of images and objects.*

HN: There is one that I really like, in brass, that definitely has that simple curve and discrete touching on the edges, like a collar. That could work well, moving from this first to more elaborate forms.

BS: *What about the cuts that you used to delineate the sheets of metal? I find it fascinating how in some you make cuts also inside the piece making everything more complex.*

HN: Yes, I also wanted to play with the cuts within, to bring more dynamism maybe, or to just allow me to play further with the forms. Across all these artworks and concepts, I want to transform two-dimensional pieces into three-dimensional objects, through the cuts, curves, and drawings.

BS: *In this process, did you visit metalworkers? To maybe learn or use them to make the drawings or to find out more about working with metal, since it is your first time?*

HN: Yes, I spoke to some artisans. Engraving metal is not difficult, especially if it is a whole surface. Once you mix that with painting or other materials, it becomes more complicated for them because the processes would change according to the surface. They use totally mechanical processes though, and to be honest, I really wanted to keep the making purely manual, because that's something that resonates more with me and in my artistic practice. A facet of the work is copying, reproducing, giving a different new life to these images, processes that today are not manual at all – a digital version of something is often enough. I wanted to keep it manual to maintain this connection, also – a type of reality – with the original and the copies simultaneously. If I wanted, I could use laser cutters for precision, but I like more the little differences and marks created by the hand-made. I learned a lot during this process and this learning is also present in the works. Mechanical processes make me think of industries and perfect repetition. My work is not about that.

One challenge is to accept errors and to decide which elements to edit, keep, or modify. For example, in one of them I drew a window bigger than the others by mistake. Should I fix it, or keep this error? An information that is missing, also present in some areas that I deliberately painted or did not, although in the original these areas were all consistent.

- BS: *In this, you control the complete production of your works too. So, the conciliation between practitioners; the seamstress and the architect. It occurs not only conceptually, but also physically when you learn while working onto the surface and applying different techniques to draw and change the surfaces. Even the learning process is very interesting, because for the first time you are replicating something that your grandfather once did; he also made these drawings for the first time when he was learning too. Would you say that by keeping the process all made by yourself, you are also keeping these private stories safe?*
- HN: I am working with these images because they came to me, and through my family they would always have come to me. Independently of that, they are objects of memory. It is also important not to create holy relics. They exist, I have them, but I don't want to see them as sacred, hence all the changes, errors, transformations. It is all a form of recognising their existence, but also of their mutability and transformation, giving them a new, different, life. What is on the other side of these drawings, all architectural and precise, examples of technical knowledge and restriction? The same applies to the clothing patterns. So, in their new life as art object, maybe they can have mistakes, inconsistencies, accidents that mutate this previous perfect, immutable, form. To me, they are now almost human.
Funnily enough, Michael, my husband, asked me why I didn't work with the original drawings, patterns, plans and templates. But I couldn't, they have been passed to my mother really, who would not allow me to "destroy" the original works by my grandfather. It is a little bit funny and ironic.
- BS: *So, the originals are sacred in the end. They have the same value as family photos for example. Important as a remembrance.*
- HN: Or the museum object. They exist as final things, and what they were or what they can be is not discussed. To me, they don't have an intrinsic value, as we are lead to believe. As objects they depend on our engagement, a discussion that leads to interpretation and meaning. That is also influencing the way I imagined them being displayed. I want to explore different ways to share them with the public.
- BS: *Maybe it would be interesting to have them on plinths with different heights, that would bring some dynamism and playfulness to the display - things you are interested in. If they are all the same perfect eye level that would resemble more a traditional museum set up, exactly the context that you want to free them from. Plus, that encourages visitors to discover the pieces from different angles. We discussed the fact that the plans are from the school you went too. So, following this thought of childhood and memories of school time, if the pieces are low, just in the movement of crouching down there is a shift in looking to these pieces at a child's eye level – like when an adult speaks to a child and does the same movement. A different conversation takes place in this setting. The plinths also don't need to be in perfect symmetry in the space.
How many pieces do you want to show?*
- HN: I have around ten pieces, so far, but I am not sure if I want to show all of them. It will be a response to the gallery space too. I will bring them all to Trace and then see what works.
- BS: *Have you thought about the title?*
- HN: I started thinking of it, but am not sure yet, so far I reference to it using *collars and cuffs*. What do you think?

BS: *The title always gives a starting point for visitors to think about the pieces. The two main initial themes have been your grandfather's architecture practice and your great-grandmother as a seamstress. So, I wonder if there is a title that would bring these two things together, or that could be ambiguous enough to allow both readings. Words such as "patterns" are used by both professions.*

HN: Yes, I need to think about it some more.

BS: *What about the edition that you are creating for the show, how is it going?*

HN: I started with this image of the roofs from the school. The lines and angles are very interesting and organised, so next I start to break with them and rearrange them in a new form that has its own balance, even if it is completely deprived of function.

BS: *So in a way you are doing one more step away from the sculptural objects. There, you are transforming two-dimensional objects into three-dimensional. Here, after this change, you make them two-dimensional again.*

HN: They become unrecognisable, or maybe there are some visual cues as to what they were. I was just really interested in the lines at first. I still need to explore further which process I want to use to reproduce the original, which colours and format.

BS: *Maybe copy processes used by architects in the past and now?*

HN: Yes, I will think about it.

Skype Berlin / Lisbon, June 18, 2018

BS: *Let's start talking about the title. I received your suggestions, and I think we both believe that the word "patterns" should definitely be in it. In Portuguese the word is "Modelos" which also works well. Both words are related to both practices as we discussed last time. Now we need to decide what else, what to include. I like "Plans & Patterns" and "Running Patterns".*

HN: My partner thinks "Plans & Patterns" is too dry. Let's think of other options. I like your suggestion of "relieve".

BS: *I suggested that word because during our talks you touched so many times on the fact that you want to liberate the original objects, take them out of a rigid life. So "relieving" is a reference to your process. But also "Relieving Patterns" can have a completely different meaning if one reads it through a social lens. In contrast to your ancestors, today you are an artist and your sister was an architect. So social norms, or professions usually attributed to one of the sexes, are now becoming more loose, in your family as a microcosm of the Portuguese society. It is not an intuitive reading of the title, but I find it very interesting.*

HN: Yes, there is an interesting echo that I like too. I was also thinking of "Running Patterns" but I also like the ambiguity of "Relieving Patterns". So let's go with it.

BS: *Great! Decided. "Relieving Patterns" it is.*

HN: Moving on to the works. I decided to not pursue the fabric installation piece. I prefer to focus on the drawings and the sculptural objects. The fabric piece will be for a future show.

BS: *I like to think as every show as a story that we want to tell, and in a way the space's size is the word count. Since Trace is a small space, it makes sense to focus on fewer pieces, so the story can come through completely and the visitors will be able to understand the show and engage with it. What about the other individual works' titles?*

HN: I am thinking of naming the individual sculptures after the original drawing plan.

BS: *That can work really well, because it gives the viewer something to look for in the piece, a search for the original drawing in the sculpture.*

Skype Berlin / Lisbon, June 21, 2018

BS: *Tell me about the display options, what have you been thinking?*

HN: I experimented with metal plinths and I am very pleased with the effect of a simple structure of lines and a base, so one can see through the plinth into the rest of the space. Since the pieces are very light, this could work well.

BS: *Sounds like something that could work, yes. I will have them made and once you are here, we can decide together about colours and set up options. What about the works? How it is going?*

HN: The sculptural objects already feel very resolved to me. I will bring them and decide which ones to display, and how, when I see the space. Now I am devoting more time to finish the edition. Following what we discussed before, I researched photocopy processes. Now, everything is digitalised and printed, so photocopies are not only not being used very often but also produce something that is not a perfect copy. That led me to the idea of the slow deterioration of the original image through a photocopy that is taken from the previous photocopy, all the way through the twenty editions. So it is an edition, but essentially every copy is different, leading to the creation of twenty unique originals.

BS: *Now that we are getting closer to the show, what are your expectations?*

HN: I am very excited about showing in Berlin for the first time. My artworks often resonate with Portuguese society and naturally I had more shows in my hometown, Lisbon. So, showing in Germany hopefully will bring new readings and interpretations, I am very much looking forward to seeing the audience's reaction and response to the works.

BS: *Thank you so much for sharing your creative process and for allowing the publication of these talks.*

HN: I am very happy to be part of in-conversation-with and hope everyone has the chance to see the exhibition.

Henrique Neves (b. 1965 in Lisbon, lives and works in Lisbon) studied Fine Art at Maumaus School of Visual Arts Lisbon and Art Theory at Goldsmiths College, London. He has exhibited in Portugal, France, and the UK. In 2016, he was among the finalists of MAC International, Belfast – Metropolitan Arts Centre. In his artistic practice, Neves quotes and appropriates personal/family memories and national narratives to transform and dislocate them, in a process that starts from something, an artefact, a given fact, or a single image that he transforms in order to unravel meaning and emotion. Neves is a multi-media artist with a strong interest in manual processes and physicality, working with an array of every-day materials such as paper, textiles, wood, to create sculptures, drawings, and installations.

<http://www.henriqueneves.com/>

Brunno Silva (b. 1986 in São Paulo, lives and works in Berlin) is a curator, writer, and art consultant. Originally from Brazil, he has a long interest in contemporary art with a passion for time-based works. He resided in London for the last two years where he studied Art History and Art Business at Sotheby's Institute of Art. During his studies he also further developed his knowledge of London's art scene, and most importantly its links and networks with the German capital. Brunno has curated exhibitions in Berlin, southern Italy and the UK.

<http://brunno.art/>

__in conversation with__ is a new exhibition format aiming at bringing people together through conversation and subsequent collaboration. Artists are invited to engage in dialogue with curators, authors, other artists, art historians, journalists or scientists and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are documented in writing, serving as text material accompanying the exhibition. They enable visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the artists' methods and of the artworks. *__in conversation with__* is based on the premise that it is the artists themselves who can best provide information about their works, their methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask. *__in conversation with__* was initiated in early 2018 by Katharina Wendler in Berlin and is guest of various (project) spaces.

Exhibition

Henrique Neves

Relieving Patterns

July 21–29, 2018

Opening: Friday, July 20, 6 pm

TRACE Projects, Mainzer Strasse 39, 12053 Berlin